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Defense of the CIA

ONE OF THE MOST thankless jobs in the world is the job done by intelligence and counterintelligence agents. Probably the most thankless of all is that performed by our CIA—the supersecret Central Intelligence Agency. Since its establishment in 1947, the CIA has too often been the butt of bad jokes and ill-advised criticism.

No agency of the government should be immune from criticism, but the CIA has had more than its share. It has become almost a national pastime to blame the CIA for half of our troubles around the world. It was the object of sharp attacks during the U2 crisis, the Bay of Pigs fiasco, the overthrow of the procommunist Arbenz government in Guatemala, the anti-Mossadegh coup in Iran and, more recently, the two revolts in South Viet Nam.

Many of these attacks have suggested more concern for sensational headlines than for the nation's security. Some undoubtedly have been communist-inspired — the Soviets have a special bureau in their secret police whose sole job is to discredit the CIA. But far too many attacks have been leveled by sincere anticommunists who have fallen into the error of believing the rumors and inaccuracies about the CIA simply because they have been repeated so often.

SEN. THOMAS DODD, D-Conn., made a brilliant defense of the CIA on the floor of the Senate a few days ago.

He pointed out that the most popular charge directed against the CIA—that it operates completely without congressional supervision—is totally false. "The CIA," he claims, "is probably one of the most supervised agencies in the government."

Special subcommittees in both the House and Senate—headed by four of the most knowledgeable legislators our nation has produced, Representatives Carl Vinson and Clarence Cannon and Senators Richard Russell and Carl Hayden—watch the CIA's activities.

Another false charge against the CIA is that the president frequently doesn't know what it is doing and that it actually makes policy. The CIA, in fact, only carries out policy and its director meets regularly with the president at sessions of the National Security Council.

CRITICISM of the CIA boils down to a basic dislike for secrecy. But Sen. Dodd reminds that we cannot compete with communism if we confine ourselves to orthodox diplomacy and orthodox intelligence collection.

Sen. Dodd notes that some people would prohibit any assistance to the forces of freedom in the name of "non-intervention" and that many "would rather let the communists take over the world than fight against them." It is certain, he says, that many countries that remain free today would not be free if it had not been for the CIA.

One of the saddest facts, from the CIA's point of view, is that the agency cannot defend itself. For reasons of national security, Dodd explains, the CIA "cannot confirm or deny published reports, true or false, favorable or unfavorable. It cannot alibi. It cannot explain. It cannot answer even the most outrageously inaccurate charges."

Two years ago, the late President Kennedy told CIA employees: "Your successes are unheralded; your failures are trumpeted." That is a fact—the CIA's employees have learned to live with, but it is also one that the American people should understand.

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